Reserve Armor NCOs Save Training Time

Units Realize Substantial Savings With Distance Learning Program

By SPC Sandra Shafer

Some Reserve Component (RC) Armor NCOs are now completing the same advanced training as their Active counterparts through a program called Distance Learning.

RC NCOs from Kentucky, Vermont, Pennsylvania and Montana (with more states to be added in the future) are completing the Armor ANCOC in eight months instead of several years. They're doing their resident training during annual training time and are receiving the same instruction as Active-duty soldiers who attend the course at Ft. Knox.

"We've taken the Active Component (AC) lesson plan for the 19K ANCOC, which runs 12 weeks, and converted it into a Distance Learning format," said SFC Jose Lopez, training developer for the post academy. "It used to be—and most units still do this—it would take a soldier several years to complete the course and be qualified. Now, they can have the same training in as little as eight months."

Lopez noted that many people confuse the program with correspondence training because it is relatively unknown in the field. While Distance Learning is currently being used only for the 19K ANCOC, Lopez says it's possible that all 19K-series professsional development courses will be offered in the future.

The first class taught by Ft. Knox was given via teletraining network in December 1992 and is currently in its third iteration. SFC Harvey Harrison, one of the course developers, said Distance Learning reduces the amount of time the soldiers remain at Ft. Knox, saving the unit money, and producing more ANCOC graduates.

"Once soldiers complete TNET training, they come here for two weeks (normal annual training time) for the hands-on-session and graduate from the course," Harrison said.

He added that the soldiers also appreciate the training because it keeps them up to speed and proficient with their duties, along with their AC counterparts. "They're a mirror image of the AC soldiers in their field, so when they train or carry out missions together, they will be on the same sheet of music."

Lopez said the Army's vision is to have "one Army, one standard, one POI." A lot of RC units are using POIs that are two and three years old, if not older. Learning from outdated material can be a problem because the soldiers won't be familiar with what their AC comrades know and are using on the battlefield.

To keep all students on the same time-line, the training schedule is generated at Ft. Knox and is strictly followed.

TNET, part of the video teletraining system, works much the way a video teleconference does. Cameras at different sites around the country are linked up to each other via satellite. The cameras and computer software allow for two-way audio/video communications at all sites capable of using the system.

The instructor can question a student at one site, and within seconds, that student can respond. A person at each site directs the cameras and sends the picture out to the other participating locations. Each site has an ANCOC graduate site facilitator to help students.

Lopez said the program uses a combination of teaching media to help with the learning and teaching processes. "We're using print material for combat leader training, computer assisted instruction, video, an interactive videodisc for vehicle identification, and the TNET with the instructor from the NCO Academy once a month." ■

Shafer is with the Public Affairs Office, Ft. Knox, KY.

THROUGH T-NET...

USASMA Implements Video Teletraining (VTT)... To Serve Active Army, Reserves, National Guard

You can cut training costs and increase productivity with fewer people through Video Teletraining (VTT) and Video Teleconferencing (VTC). All it takes is a telephone call to a U.S. Army Sergeants Major Academy (USASMA) point of contact.

VTT, which USASMA is implementing, is televised two-way communication from one VTT site to one or more other distant sites. It includes the capabilities of: classroom presentations and assistance in unit training. Soldiers can receive training before attending school, which tends to reduce failure rates. The training is a direct, two-way communication between instructor and student. For example, the Chief of Staff or SMA can hold an interactive conference with 700 soldiers at USASMA with no need to go TDY.

VTT includes the capabilities of interviewing, meeting, greeting and conferencing without having to travel from one location to another.

An obvious question is: "How do I set up a conference if I'm not at a sender/receiver site?" The answer is through a unique system called VideoTelecom (VTEL), which allows posts without a VTT site to link up with posts that have only a VTC site.

USASMA, which serves the Active Army, Reserves and National Guard, provides updates to eight full-time RC NCO academies.

Some examples of USASMA/VTT courses/uses are: Battle Staff Course-related unit training, Sergeants Major Course, PLDC, Small Group Instructor Training, etc.

POC for scheduling and general information is SGM Efrain Bazan, VTT NCOIC, USASMA, at DSN 978-8799, COM (915) 568-8799. ■